LAURA LEVINE

COMATEENS

A Radio Catch-22

The subject is hit records, and how to get them. Let's ask the **Comateens**, who with three albums under their collective belt, should know what it's all about. How would you describe the hitmaking process, gang?

Lyn Byrd, synthesizer/vocals: "It's kinda frustrating."

Nic North, bass/vocals: "Intensely frustrating."

Hmmm. Maybe we chose the wrong group? Not from the sound of things. *Deal With It*, the New York-based trio's current album, is awash with perky melodies, snappy arrangements and colorful textures. For extra push there's even a guest drummer, replacing "Rolly," the band's longtime Roland drum machine. What there isn't—so far, at least—is radio airplay.

"Music is not the yardstick" for getting on the air, North says; "Arbitron is—a computerized system which shows what people have liked before, but can't possibly show what people will like in the future."

Since Byrd (Billman), North (Dembling) and guitarist brother Oliver got together in 1978, the closest the Comateens have come to U.S. success is "Get Off My Case," a dance top thirty track whose popularity took even the group by surprise. Pete Solley, of Romantics fame, produced *Deal With It*; the Comateens concocted the poppy "Resist Her" as a potential single. And radio turned a deaf ear.

"Radio doesn't listen to records," states Jerry Jaffe, senior vice president, rock division of PolyGram Records. Jaffe signed the Comateens to PolyGram, and he's especially disturbed about the lack of response to "Resist Her." Instead, college radio and stations like WLIR-FM in Hempstead, New York are favoring the funkier "Don't Come Back." (WLIR music director Rosie Pisani says that "'Resist Her' is a pretty track, but 'Don't Come Back' is more in keeping with the way the band sounded, and what we're doing.")

Radio is an important element in the hit equation, but not the only one. It might mean something that while the Comateens have toured France three times (going on a fourth), they have yet to play west of Madison, Wisconsin or south of Washington, D.C. Their name, too, can be offputting to the solid middle Americans who determine solid hits.

So the Comateens are caught in a vicious cycle: Lack of "progressive" radio interest in an album cut precludes a 45 release to bait the top-forty stations. Jaffe laments that key stations like WLIR, KROQ in Los Angeles and San Francisco's KQAK "weren't into" "Resist Her." "I was really looking for a major break-out. We didn't get it. What can I tell ya?"

The Comateens, meanwhile, will have to broadcast their pop-funk music without benefit of radio exposure. Do they find the pop life glamorous?

"Are you kidding?" Byrd laughs. – **Scott Isler**

News Stories by Scott Isler

No Dancing In The Aisles

The music-movie clip wars are heating up. Besides Concert Cinema (*Music Industry News*, October 1984), which provides theaters with concert clips transferred from video, a company called Music Motions is traveling a similar route.

There are differences. Music Motions will have none of video technology, distributing only clips originally shot on 35mm film. The company even produced its first offering, Carly Simon's "It Happens Everyday"—"a costly venture for a launch," notes president Tom Hayes.

The Simon clip ran in only sixty theaters. Hayes expects much bigger numbers with Music Motions' second film, "Dynamite" by Jermaine Jackson. Following will be Ian Siam, Julian Lennon and a particularly striking "Madam Butterfly" from Malcolm McLaren. Unlike the sponsored Concert Cinema video transfers, Music Motions films are commercial-free—for now, anyway. Hayes is investigating "sponsorship" tie-ins that would enable the company to supply theaters gratis, rather than charge for rental. Hayes mentions that twenty-five percent of U.S. movie palaces are showing advertising spots anyway.

Art, "product," what's the difference.